



City of Seattle

Office of the Mayor

Seattle Police Department

R. Gil Kerlikowske, Chief of Police

April 3, 2003

Council Member Sharon McPhail
Detroit City Council
Coleman A. Young Municipal Center
2 Woodward Ave., Suite 1340
Detroit, MI 48226

RE: Missing Person Investigative Procedures

Dear Councilmember McPhail:

Your inquiry into our procedures for the investigation of missing person cases couldn't have been timelier. The Seattle Police Department is now in the process of producing an instructive video to enhance the training of our personnel in the areas of missing person/juvenile runaway cases.

It is our intent that this initiative becomes a benchmark for utilizing the best practices available for these cases. We will be happy to provide you a copy of the finished product upon completion. It should answer each of the questions you have posed.

In the meantime, the following information is provided:

1. The Missing Person detail is comprised of one detective, assigned to the Homicide/Assault Unit. That detective is responsible for all MP cases EXCEPT juvenile runaways and custodial interference. (Juvenile runaway cases are followed up by civilian Community Service Officers until such time facts indicate suspected foul play. A specialist detective who works within the Domestic Violence Unit handles custodial Interference cases.) The salary of the MP detective [\$85,000.00 approximately, including benefits] is the only dedicated budget expense related to this function.
2. One full-time sworn employee (Police Officer plus Detective Premium of 4%)
3. Within the normal expense of operations.
4. Our missing person's detective handles approximately 540 adult MP cases a year. Of that number, she clears over 97%.
5. There are a total of 15-20 cases involving children where foul play is considered a possibility. Most of those cases are cleared within a short time. Our Community Service Officers handle several thousand juvenile runaway cases per year; most clearing within a couple of days. Any case handled by the CSO office that appears to be criminal in nature is referred to the MP detective in the Homicide office.
6. See enclosed policy/procedure
7. See enclosed policy/procedure

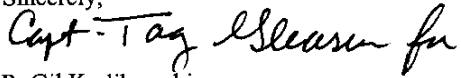
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8. Yes. We have recently implemented the AMBER ALERT protocol throughout King County. We are also accepting a computer system from the National Center for Missing Children. This system will allow us to put out information on cases requiring immediate attention to all parties concerned.
9. The MP detective is responsible for all MP cases, regardless of which precinct it occurs in.
10. The MP detective maintains a computer database on missing persons (based on Microsoft Access)
11. See enclosed policy/procedure


If you need more detail on this issue, please feel free to contact Detective Tina Drain at (206) 684-5582 or Detective Sergeant Ed Striedinger at (206) 684-5552.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Capt. Tag Gleason for".

R. Gil Kerlikowski
Chief of Police

Tag Gleason
Captain
Violent Crimes Section

 Seattle Police Department Policies and Procedures		Section 3.101
Title: III - Preliminary Investigations	Chapter: 101 - Missing Persons	

I. Circumstances When a Report is Required

- A. A *Missing Person Report* (form 5.1.2) is required when a person of any age is reported missing for any period of time and falls into one or more of the following categories:
 1. Endangered: A person in the company of another person under circumstances indicating the missing person is in physical danger. (Note: any person who is reported missing after a disaster is considered endangered and a report is required.),
 2. Involuntary: Missing under circumstances indicating the disappearance is not voluntary,
 3. Disabled: Has documented physical or mental disability which might cause them to be an immediate danger to themselves or others, and
 4. Juvenile: Any unemancipated juvenile.
- B. In addition, a report shall be taken in any circumstance if a parent, guardian, relative or other responsible person makes a request.
- C. The location of the residence of the person who is missing dictates the jurisdiction that initiates the *Missing Person Report*. For example, if a missing person was last seen in Seattle, but failed to return to their residence in Bellevue, then the Bellevue Police Department would be responsible for filing a missing person report. Seattle Police will assist the originating agency as necessary.

II. Reporting Procedures

- A. Complete the *Missing Person Report* (form 5.1.2).
 1. Indicate one of the above listed categories along with a "signed documentation statement." Information will be entered into WACIC and NCIC by the Data Center.
 2. WACIC and NCIC will not accept a report that does not include the missing person's full name and date of birth. The report must be as complete as possible.
 3. Fax the completed report to the Data Center. Call the Data Center to confirm the report was received.
- B. A *Missing Person Report* will not be taken to assist litigants in a civil cases, process servers, bill collectors, skip tracers, in the compilation of family histories, or in the location of heirs.
- C. The Homicide/Assault Unit conducts the follow-up investigation on missing persons. Officers may contact the Homicide / Assault Unit for advice. If no one is available for advice regarding the reporting process, take the report.

III. Amber Alert Plan

- A. The Amber Alert Plan is a collaborative effort between law enforcement agencies and the local media within King County. The media will use the EAS (Emergency Alert System) to notify the general public of the Amber Alert activation and request their assistance. The media will announce the description of the missing child, details of the abduction, abductor information, vehicle information, possible direction of travel and any other information that is deemed helpful by the investigating agency. Citizens will be advised to call 911 with any possible information regarding the Alert.

- B. The initial responding officer will take a *Missing Person Report* per normal procedures. When taking the report the officer will keep in mind the criteria for the Amber Alert Plan. The incident must contain all of the following elements:
 - 1. The victim is under the age of 16 years of age.
 - 2. The victim is not a voluntary runaway (previous history of runaway reports is not a sole factor for exclusion).
 - 3. There appears to be a risk of injury or death to the victim.
 - 4. There must be enough descriptive information available to believe that if it is disseminated to the public it would help locate the child, suspect and/or suspect's vehicle.
 - 5. It must be reported to and investigated by a law enforcement agency.
- C. If the initial responding officer believes all of the criteria for initiation of the Amber Alert Plan are fulfilled then a supervisor must be notified immediately. A Lieutenant or above must review the Victim Criteria prior to any initiation of the Amber Plan. The *Missing Persons Report* will still be completed per normal procedures.
- D. After it has been approved, a Sergeant or above shall implement the plan by:
 - 1. Calling SPD Communications and notifying them of the situation and faxing them the King County Regional Amber Alert Report.
 - 2. Contacting the Missing Persons Unit by phone or through Communications and notifying detectives of the situation.



Seattle Police Department

Training Topic

Number:

018

Title:

Police Response to Missing or Abducted Children

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PURPOSE

The information in this bulletin is intended to assist police employees in responding to reports of missing or abducted children. The information should be considered by all employees as a guide when investigating these incidents. It is not intended to necessarily be followed step by step by officers during each specific missing child investigation. It is provided as a framework for which all police employees can refer to in order to craft a tailored response to each incident of a missing or abducted child in which they may become involved.

TYPES OF MISSING CHILDREN INVESTIGATIONS

Generally, missing children investigations fall into four categories: lost or missing, runaway, family abduction, and stranger abduction. The Seattle Police Department receives hundreds of missing children reports every year. These incidents are received via phone by Communications personnel, or in person by personnel in the field. The child may have been lost during a community celebration, family picnic, or during a shopping trip. The child may be late from school, an appointment, or from an authorized trip with a parent, guardian, or other care taker. In most cases of reported missing children, it is important to remember that the child is just missing, and not anything more. These children are simply not where their parent(s) or guardians expect them to be. They usually do reappear after a short period of time with no evidence of criminal wrong doing. However, there are times when the child is actually lost, or may have been abducted.

In most cases, when children are taken against their will, or 'abducted', it is usually by estranged parents or other family members. While the event is traumatic for both the legal custodian of the child and the child, the child is usually returned with little or no harm within time. The number of children who are abducted by strangers each year is smaller than those who are taken by known persons. The

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Originator Homicide/Assault Unit

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number of cases where children are abducted, and subsequently murdered, is even less. A recent study by the Washington State Homicide Incident Tracking System (HITS), Office of the Attorney General shows that abducted child homicides make up only 1/2 of one percent of all homicide investigations nationwide. However, every employee should initially approach each investigation with the understanding that the 'missing' child may have in fact been abducted, and may be in serious danger. Police personnel should respond to each 'missing' child call with the understanding that a violent crime may have occurred, and react accordingly, being alert to possible evidence of a criminal act.

INITIAL POLICE RESPONSE

I. COMMUNICATIONS SECTION:

- A. Receive report from parent/guardian/caller.
- B. Obtain basic facts, details, and brief description of missing child and abductor if applicable.
- C. Dispatch officer to scene to conduct primary investigation.
- D. Consider searching CAD records for previous incidents related to missing children or prior police reports in area of prowlers, indecent exposure, attempted abductions and relay information to primary officer.
- E. Broadcast known details on all broadcast frequencies to other units, Metro Transit, and surrounding police agencies.
- F. Activate any fugitive or fleeing felon search plans if necessary.

II. PRIMARY PATROL UNIT:

- A. Interview parents/person who made initial report.
- B. Verify that child is indeed missing.
- C. Verify child's custody status.
- D. Determine when, where, and by whom missing child was last seen.
- E. Interview persons who last had contact with child.
- F. Identify child's 'zone of safety' (area that child feels safe or comfortable in) for his/her age/developmental stage.
- G. Based on available information, make an initial determination of whether this is a non-family abduction, family abduction, endangered runaway, or lost, injured, or otherwise missing child.
- H. Obtain detailed description of the missing child, abductor, or vehicles, etc.
- I. Relay detailed descriptive information to communications for broadcast.
- J. Request additional police personnel and a supervisor if circumstances require.
- K. Ensure that everyone at the scene is identified and interviewed separately. Collect all pertinent identifying information on these persons. Determine where each person last saw the child. Ask each person; "What do you think happened to the child?" and document their response.

- L. Obtain and note permission to search home where the child lives or building where the incident took place. Treat the area as a possible crime scene.
- M. Conduct search to include all surrounding areas including vehicles and other places of concealment. Treat the area as a crime scene.

III. INVESTIGATING DETECTIVE RESPONSE

- A. Obtain briefing from first responding officer and other on-scene personnel.
- B. Verify the accuracy of all descriptive information and other details developed during the preliminary investigation.
- C. Obtain a brief, recent history of family dynamics.
- D. Correct and investigate the reasons for any conflicting information offered by witnesses and other persons submitting information.
- E. Review and evaluate all available information collected.
- F. Develop an investigative plan for follow-up. Consider the publication of a missing person bulletin and coordinate with media relations for immediate broadcast.
- G. Determine what additional resources and specialized services are required.
- H. Execute investigative follow-up plan.

IV. SUPERVISORY RESPONSE

- A. Obtain briefing and any written reports from first responding officer, investigators, and other agency personnel at the scene. (If an investigative unit does respond they will assume command of the scene.)
- B. Determine if additional personnel from a follow-up unit are needed to investigate the scene. Supervisor should contact the Homicide/Assault unit if investigative advice or assistance is needed.
- C. Determine if outside help is necessary: Specialized units, search and rescue, state missing children's clearing house, other police agencies, FBI, or the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).
- D. Ensure that all of the necessary resources, equipment, and assistance necessary to conduct an efficient investigation have been requested and expedite their availability.
- E. If a command post is established, do not place it near the missing child's residence.
- F. Ensure that an accurate record is maintained of anyone involved in the search, any witnesses in the area, and anyone who accessed the missing child's place of residence or last known location.
- G. Ensure all coordination/cooperation among all police personnel involved in the investigation and search effort.
- H. Ensure that all required department notifications are made.
- I. Be available to make decisions.

- J. Contact the Media Relations Unit and utilize the media through a planned and coordinated strategy to assist in the search for the missing child. Maintain media relations throughout the incident.
 - 1. Establish a hotline for witness and citizen tips and information with the help of the Media Relations Unit.

LIAISON WITH COMMUNITY GROUPS AND NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

The emotions that arise during missing child investigations, especially those cases where a non-family abduction is suspected, are not limited only to the immediate family members or the assigned investigators. Residents of the child's neighborhood or city closely share the sense of loss with the family and often focus their actions by establishing an organization dedicated to the child's safe return.

Even with all of the investigative functions created by the high-visibility missing or abducted cases, police must not forget that these organizations, when their energies are channeled in a positive direction, can provide services that may significantly enhance the possibility of successful case outcome. Conversely, if left undirected or without close liaison to the police investigators, these same groups may overlook the meaningfulness of any important information that they receive and thereby inadvertently jeopardize case outcome. These groups may have talent and resources that they can offer for free. They include staffing hotlines, producing and distributing fliers, computerizing case management, and assisting with media presentations. Because of the extensive tasks that these organizations often perform, it is important that a cooperative, professional relationship be promptly established to avoid errors in case management, delays in resolution of the case, and even loss of community support for the law enforcement effort.

The Department may allow some of these groups to assist in the various tasks of finding the lost child, but at the same time the Department must firmly establish and make clear that it is understood that the Department has overall control, authority, and responsibility of the investigation. The follow-up unit responsible for the case should consider assigning an investigator as a direct liaison with the group. This person should be a true investigator and not just a person sent to 'baby sit' the group. By initiating this liaison the Department can educate the community group about the importance of investigative objectives.

RESOURCES TO BE CONSIDERED FOR ASSISTING IN MISSING AND ABDUCTED CHILDREN INVESTIGATIONS.

Crime Survivor Services Section and Community Service Officers, Community Policing Bureau.

National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC)
1-800-THE-LOST, (1-800-843-5678)

National Crime Information Center (Missing Person File, Unidentified Person File, Off-Line Search Procedure)

Morgan P. Hardiman Task Force on Missing and Exploited Children (Provides specialized expertise, in an advisory capacity, via NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN (NCMEC), to the agency in charge of the investigation.)

Nonprofit Missing Children's Organizations (Provide support services to families and conducts training to community groups for missing child and child abduction prevention.)

King County Police, Special Operations, Search and Rescue, 206-296-3853
(Provides coordinated multi-agency search assistance for lost persons and/or evidence search in large areas.)

Washington State Patrol/Missing Children Clearinghouse 1-800-543-5678

Federal Bureau of Investigation

PREVENTION AND PROBLEM SOLVING: PLANNING AHEAD

Police personnel may be asked to speak to community groups or to individuals about how to minimize the risk of their children becoming lost or abducted. Studies have shown us several things that people can do to eliminate or minimize the opportunity for their children from becoming victims. The first is that children are not immune from becoming lost or abducted because they are close to home. A recent study showed that one half of all abductions that led to murder took place within three block of home, and one third of those within one half block of the victim's home. (Washington State Homicide Incident Tracking System (HITS), Office of the Attorney General.)

The best prevention is to ensure that children are supervised at all times, even if they are on their own property. Children should not speak to strangers. Additionally, children should never approach cars, whether the occupant is a stranger or not. Children should be warned that if someone approaches them and offers a ride, asks for directions, offers treats or a look at a pet, the child should run the opposite direction to a safe place and tell their guardian.

Everyone should be aware of strangers and unusual behavior in their neighborhood. Suspicious activity, cars, people, and identifying numbers should be written down. Many abductions are actually witnessed by people who believe a crime is not being committed. An adult grabbing a struggling child may be misinterpreted as an adult handling an unruly child. In most cases that is probably what it is. Yet nothing should prevent the witness from evaluating, possibly intervening, or from at least noting the descriptions and license numbers.

Regardless, when observing any suspicious activity by an adult with a child, people should call police immediately.

Supervisors should prepare themselves for the rare event of being the first ranking individual on the scene of an actual abduction of a child. Reviewing various publications and discussing response options with peers will prepare the leader for the proper management of a critical event like this should it occur in the future.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The following resources were used to develop this training topic, and are suggested reading:

"Missing and Abducted Children: A Law Enforcement Guide to Case Investigation and Program Management", published by NCMES

"Case Management for Missing Children Homicide Investigation", published by Washington State Attorney General, Homicide Incident Tracking System Office. Limited copies are available at the Homicide/Assault and Special Assault Units.